

EXTENSION

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December 1, 2003

Office of the Secretary
Case Control Unit
STB Finance Docket 34075
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K Street, NW
Washington D.C 20423-0001

STB Finance Docket No. 34075 – Environmental Comments, Six County Association of Governments Rail Line Between Levan and Salina, Utah

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I represent Utah State University - Extension as an Area Extension Agent for Agriculture Economic Development in Central Utah. Three years ago I was asked by the Six County AOG commissioners and mayors to serve as a member the "rail technical advisory committee (RTC)". Our committee was instructed to study the feasibility of building a short line railroad from Levan to Salina Utah and if possible move the project forward to a point it can be permitted, financed and constructed.

The importance of increase the economic viability of the coal mine and coal trucking companies is very critical to regional economy. These businesses provide over 500 direct jobs, thousands of indirect jobs and 28% of the tax base of Sevier County. Once rail serves is reestablished, additional economic development opportunities will be possible. New economic opportunities provided by rail service will create new jobs, tax base and diversity the economy, which is desperately needed in the region. Since 1983, when a land slide and political special interests eliminated rail service to the region, many residents, businesses and community leaders have looked for the day for a return of rail service. We are working to achieve that.

One of my primary roles as a member of the RTC is to educate, inform, communicate and involve farmers and ranchers that are private landowners along the proposed alignment. USU - Extension has a long history of working closely with farmers, ranchers and owners of livestock operations in the area. Myself and several other Extension Agent provide researched based, educational information to help farmers and ranchers keep their family agricultural businesses economically viable and sustainable.

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We have involving agricultural landowners in planning and developing alignment proposals for this project. We believe this is critical to develop their support for the proposal and to minimize conflicts with them as the project moves forward. It will also minimize negative impacts on their operations. The commissioners, mayors asked the RTC to create a sub committee of several influential farmers that are significant land owners along the proposed corridor. Members of this sub committee have participated to varying degrees in public meetings and work sessions and provided significant input and information that has been incorporated into the preliminary alignment proposal that was submitted to SEA as part of our application. Input from the subcommittee, elected officials, RTC and other community residents helped identify the rail alignment corridors that were studies as part of the original feasibility study for the project. Their input along with agency input also helped identify the preferred alternative corridor, which was eventually developed into a possible proposed alignment by a railroad engineer with the Washington Group.

The agriculture community has some obvious concerns about how the proposed railroad project might impact their operation, especially if it cuts fields in half, isolates land on one side of the tracks, interferes with livestock movements and generally disrupts agricultural activities. They are particularly concerned that thoughtless, arbitrary decisions will be made by engineers and decisions makers that will cause serious, easily avoidable, long term problems for their operations.

As as youth I had first hand experience working on a farm that was cut in half by a new freeway. I also have close family members that also have experienced a freeway cutting their farm in half. Good advanced planning, communication and involvement created a positive outcome for one, but the other was ignored and is suffering significant, long term, negative impacts that could have been easily solved.

As a member of the RTC I have attended dozens of committee meetings, helped provided six public informational meetings, visited with hundreds of residents, lobbied congress, studied alignments possibilities and visited with farmers and ranchers.

It is safe to say that most residents support the concept of the railroad proposal, which will reduce traffic from 600 coal trucks a day on our rural highways and the associated safety concerns at school crosswalks in our small communities. They also are very well aware of the economic importance of the jobs and tax base provided by the coal mine and trucking companies and support efforts to help them become more economically viable.

As a committee we have recognized our role has changed from lead to support as this project continues to move forward. Please reach out to the agricultural private landowners along the alignment to seek their continued input and involvement. This essential proactive action will help prevent needless landowner conflicts and will help minimize significant long term impacts to those who's lands this project will cross.

Agriculture is also one of the corner stones of the economic foundation in the region. It is more than just land and animal operations. Agriculture is a system of land, livestock, and farmable

soils, bound together by a network of irrigation arteries, agricultural roads and livestock paths that were established over a century ago.

Please make sure that the intricacies of this system are carefully considered by the design engineers and decision makers. Involving farmers and ranchers, who know the agriculture, network the best and including their recommendations into the final alignment location and design will minimize negative impacts and reduce landowner conflicts. I recognize that reasonable design and engineering criteria for railroads rail roads

I believe the preferred alignment represents the best place for this railroad to be built. It minimizes as much as possible the splitting of irrigated farmlands and impacts on the community. I also recognized some ongoing changes to the proposed alignment will be needed as it is studied and engineered.

We hope that the STB can complete its review as quickly as possible so we can move to the next phase.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jody A. Gale", is written over the printed name.

Jody A. Gale

Area Extension Agent

Utah State University - Extension